

THE LAST VOYAGE AND WRECK OF THE WHALE SHIP "CANTON"  
OF NEW BEDFORD

by S. S. Longley



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"CANTON" OF NEW BEDFORD.

It was the golden age of New Bedford in 1852, there were 311 whaling vessels that called New Bedford home, which brought nearly \$110000.00 worth of oil and bone that year, never was there in this whaling city's history a more prosperous time for the whaling fleet.

Petroleum had not yet been discovered.

The good ship Canton cleared from Tabers Wharf, New Bedford, August 10, 1852, bound for the Okotck Sea for Whale Oil, with as good a crew of officers and men as ever manned a ship.

We started with thirty two and the second day out a young negro stowaway appeared making thirty three. Captain A.J. Wing, young, intelligent, sharp and energetic, who had made a name second to none as master and whaleman in former voyages from Long Plains, Mass.

First Mate, Wm. Carroll, two hundred twenty lbs., six feet two, every inch a sailor and whaleman, Mr. Fisher, second mate from the Vineyard, an experienced whaleman, Mr. Martin, third mate the same, Boat Steerer Bisby, W.A. Ashley, T.E. Braley, Wm. Manther were also from Long Plains and they said that while living their Post Office would be Long Plains, that a man once resident of Long Plains he would never move away. Chas. V. Edes, Sumner Thompson and Sylvanus S. Longley were from Dover and Foxcroft villages, Maine.

The Greenhorns were shaved on crossing the line, the few able seamen taught the greenhorns the first lessons in seamanship.

We rounded Cape Horn with out anything out of the ordinary happening, most every one was sea sick but soon got over that.

When going up the coast of Chille one stormy night all hands were called to reef the Main Top Sail just before change of watch at one o'clock, that done and the watch went below when some one said "Where is Thompson"?, who should have gone below, it was it near neighbor in the bunk, he was gone, the whole ships crew was aroused but Sumner Thompson could not be found, he had been on the Lee Main Top Yard arm and was seen on the Main Top going down, and it was supposed he went down the Lee Ratlines and sløpped off the Gun Whale, because of the noise of the storm if he cried our no one heard him.

Captain Wing said, "It is too late to help him, if I had known it at the time I would have put the ship in Stays if it had sunk her in a holy minute" or words to that effect. Poor Sumner Thompson, he was never heard of again.

We called at the Sandwich Islands for fresh water and supplies. Thence to the Okotck Sea where we got a good seasoned catch of oil and bone, in the late fall we headed south for a cruise for Sperm Whales and to Otaheite where we sent home 1400 barrels of oil and some bone. From Otaheite to cruise through the Sperm Whale waters then to the Okatsk Sea again.

On the 4th of March, 1854 at about one A.M. the ship was bowling along under shortened sail with a fresh wind beaft the Post Beam, the Larboard watch was being called to their turn on deck when from the Lookout on



the Port Bow the startling cry, "Hard up your helm, breakers ahead, hard up, hard up". All the watch on deck were on their feet in an instant but nothing could be done, the ship just then touched the bottom slightly, then she brought up with a jerk that sent the spray over the deck.

The writer was sitting on the Windlass just beaft the Fore Hatch just as the ship touched slightly, turning his head he could see the white streak of Breakers on both Bows. A number of the crew ~~we~~ were getting ready to lower the waist boat when the tall, athletic form of Mr. Carroll appeared. Taking in the situation at a glance and seizing a handspike ordered, "Belay that davy tackle, ~~fall below~~ all I'll-----kill you" The davy tackle was belayed instnatly, it would have been sure death to the boats crew if it has been lowered.

Putting the Helm aport had brought her around Larboard side on and the waves made a clean sweep fore and aft. Captain Wing ordered the fore and Mizzenmast and the Main Top Mast cut away, he cut away the Mizzenmast himself and said "Longley (who was near the Main Rigging) you hold on with both hands and when you can cut away the Lanyards of the Main Top Mast".

I think Mr. Carroll crawled forward and cut away the Foremast and we could do no more. Every man was ordered to take care of himself, most every one tied himself to the Weather Gunwhale, the first two or three hours the waves broke over us every few ~~minutes~~ nearly carrying us away but we ~~stuck~~ to the weather Gunwhale. Captain Wing and Mr. Carroll said that the chart showed no land near where we were.

In a few hours by the dawns early light we could see a white streak a few hundred yards to the Leeward which proved white sand on the beach. The question was how to get to that white streak of sand, some oil casks were broken open and their contents thrown on the water but it made no perceptible difference, the waves did not break over the ship as badly as at first but three or four hundred feet was a long distance.

Two or three men tried to swim to the shore with the rope but the current swinging around the end of the ship was too much, no man could do it. Captain Wing said "I can take that Larboard boat and with a good crew can make the beach with a ropes end". Mr. Carroll said "Captain, that is a dangerous trip, you have a family, I have none, I'll go". With six good men at the oars he made the trip pulled fifty fathoms or so of line ashore, tied the boat to the line and we on the ship pulled the boat back, the third or fourth time she was swamped and put out of commission. The only show now was to tie ourselves to the rope and those on shore pulled them through the breakers. Captain Wing directing on the ship and Mr. Carroll on shore.

At last every one was ashore and alive although a number had to be rolled on barrels to bring them to life. The next thing was to fix for the changed conditions. Captain Wing was the last to leave the ship. Captain Wing was ably assisted by Mr. Carroll and the other officers and crew.

Soon after the ship struck, the Larboard Quarter below deck broke away and casks of bread, water, some meat, clothing and sails came in on the breakers and the crew went out and brought them ashore. We were in a hot country and must have ~~sailed~~ shade. Sails were rigged up for shade on the sand, a



thermometer showed 135 degrees, matches laid on the sand to dry, burned, the island was perhaps two miles long and one half or so wide with a lagoon opening to the sea on the Lee side. No vegetation except something resembling a Mullen stock and leaves and no water.

There were plenty of fish and we used them freely, saving what the waves brought in reach, putting up shade etc. it took the first two or three days. Then it was found that the ship had been pushed farther on the Coral and soon parties went abroad and got some things that we needed.

The only way to get from Bow to Stern was to crawl on hands and knees under the awning and make for some of the islands west of us for we were in the South East Trade winds. At a council of war it was decided to repair four boats, build them two streaks higher with rudder, sails keel and awning over the middle leaving both ends open and fast to the Gunwhale and raised in the center.

We have saved an Epitome which with a Quadrant that was saved we could tell the Latitude, for Longitude we must depend on dead reckoning.

Mr. Carroll and Captain Wing were expert sail boat men and we had a good ship's carpenter, the boats were put in first class shape, we hauled a boat to the Lagoon and explored it reporting a clear channel to the sea. After twenty five busy days the boats repaired, small casks of water and small sacks of bread were stored and we were ready the morning of March 30, 1854.

The fleet of four boats started, got out in the open sea, the council decided to go on an allowance of one half pint of water and one half biscuit of hard bread per day, a pump was made of a sawed off gun barrel and a man was appointed to divide the bread and water. A man was turned back too and was asked whose share is this, it proved quite satisfactory. There were nine men each in Captain Wing's and Mr. Carroll's six oared boats, seven in second mate Fishers and eight in third mate Martin's five oared boats.

The isle of Sunday was about 100 miles west and one degree North and we headed for that, with a fresh breeze on our Larboard quarter, Carrolls and Martins boats to left and Fishers to the right of Captain Wings, with orders to spread out so as to comfortably see the boat to the center and more apt to see land or sail and to come to the captain at night.

At dusk Mr. Martin from the south came up to the other boats and said he thought he could hear breakers south west of him when he hauled to the north to come together a council decided to go south where Mr. Martin heard the breakers, we took a course south southwest and kept it hour or two or more, finding no breakers, land or anything. We hauled on our course again and there we missed the island we were after although probably it would have done us no good if we had found it for I believe it was not inhabited.

The arrangements for keeping together at night, which was very difficult was for the Captains boat to have a lantern raised at the stern and the other boats to keep by that light all under shortened sail, with a fresh wind that threw a little spray making it very hard to tell whether the light was far or near, we came near running one another down.



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We got through the night and other nights and days like wise, the Epitome told of a number of islands west and a little north of us, the plan was to get in a latitude of an island that we thought was west of us then to take a due west course, to hit it we made a course for the Gilbert Group did not find them Niekunon or Byron Islands and for Tapentenea or Drummond Island and the King Mills group, after a few days out we logged the boats and there was a fresh breeze and there was almost always a fresh East South East wind, we found we were ~~xxx next xxxxx~~ making ten or twelve knots an hour which was faster than we expected when we rigged them. Mr. Carroll having been a sporting sail boat man in his earlier years and having rigged his boat better ~~had~~ the fastest boat in the outfit, Mr. Fishers was the slowest and he begged Mr. Carroll to ~~Whom~~ run away from him which Carroll promised.

When we were about where the Gilbert Group were supposed to be there were lots of signs of land, cocoa, nuthucks, logs and other things from land were floating on the water but it was foggy weather and we could see no land.

We had some bad weather and some narrow escapes, we were running one day in a heavy wind straight astern when a heavy wave took us and our sail boom swung from Starboard to Larboard mightily nearly swamped us, Mr. Carroll laughing said "We came mighty near turning turtle". We afterward learned that the ship Warren lost all her sails within fifty miles of where our little ~~fleet~~ was at the same time.

After a council we had decided that we were past King Mills group, the best show was the Cadrones perhaps six or eight hundred miles north they were surely west yet a group of eight or ten islands in a string laying northeast and southwest that were higher than any we had passed and not far apart. We could surely strike a broadside that was more than one hundred miles long, we accordingly steered north until in the Latitude of them then due west.

Some thirty five days out there were some showers and we tried to stay in them and get in them to catch fresh water, we were not very successful, by the time we had the salt washed from the awning (that was our only place to catch water) the rain was about over. We were pretty well sobered by this time, no acute suffering but a dull hunger and thirst. Our darkey stowaway said "When it comes to drawing lots I am not in it, you take me with out drawing lots", but we did not get to that, some dragged their ~~heads~~ in water to cure their thirst.

The men spent hours every day telling what they liked best and would order at their favorite restaurants before they went home, always providing they got on land again for some thought that all land was sunk.

We kept regular watches one man at the helm and one ~~xxx~~ on the lookout. Mr. Carroll had a fine Chronometer watch laying in the fore sheet all the time.

About forty days out on the dead of night a voice under the awning of the Larboard boat said if we kill Mr. Carroll and the old man we can get plenty of water while it lasts. The next morning Mr. Carroll and Captain Wing were told, they questioned the man he denied any knowledge of anything of the kind, he has talked in his sleep and it was dropped.

About forty two days out the biscuit in Mr. Carroll's larboard boat were all gone except enough for one days ration.

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We hauled alongside Mr. Fishers boat that evening and told him, he did not like to help us, some of his crew said they had three or four little sacks left. Fisher had seven men and Carroll nine while Fisher had the same amount of bread to start with that we had. The next morning we laid alongside the waist boat again and Mr. Carroll said to Mr. Fisher "If you do not give me a bag of bread I will run you down as sure as there is a God". That evening Mr. Fisher came alongside and passed us a sack of bread and was very pleasant about it.

On the morning of the 45th day at daybreak pooby birds were seen coming from our Larboard Bow, the writer was on the lookout and called Mr. Carroll, a council was called each on said the birds were coming from land, that they had passed the night on land and were going fishing. We hauled up to about South west where the birds were coming from and in about three or four hours we sighted land, O Joyful sight, every one took it quite calmly.

In fact every one was too weak to make much of a celebration although it was what we had been looking for for forty five long weary days. It proved to be Madalina Rock with no land, no harbor or good landing, no fresh water, a little wave swept beach, a clear hole under the center of the rock large enough for a boat to go through when the water was calm.

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The next thing was landing party from each boat, men that could stand and walk, good capable men to care for the boats, the writer was detailed to care for Larboard boat, each boats party went ashore and knocked over Boobies and gathered their eggs, two men would catch a Booby, each on ~~take~~ take a leg and pull them apart, under the present circumstances it was good with out cooking. It did not take long to get all the provisions they could handle of Boobies and eggs.

They were soon on the boats safe and sound although it was a difficult job on the surf. We laid by near the rock that night, there was no one to assure us that this was a part of the Ladrone Islands but the Epitome showed us that about ten miles north of Madalina ~~Islands~~ Rock there was another small Island, therefore we would go north far enough and see the other Island, we would be reasonably sure that we were at the Ladrone and if we were the main and inhabited part of them was south of us and the next one south was far enough off that we must lose sight of Madalina to see it.

Next morning we all headed about north and after going about four or five miles we could see another island, it was then "Boutship and full sail south, passed Madalina and headed for Antajan of the Ladrone Group". Perhaps every one ate every three or four hours but were cautioned not to eat too much of that cold chicken or eggs. At Antajan we found a nice harbour and all went ashore among the tall coconut trees.

We had Yankee boys, Portugese and Kanakas, all good climbers but they were all too weak, they could not climb a tree but hatchets we had saved from the wreck were found and trees cut down, the coconuts cut open and both meat and milk devoured, so much that it physiced and that did them good. There were wild hogs and fowl here but we were not equal to the job of getting them. Here we filled some of our small barrels with water.

Thence south to Sypan from whose shores we were met by high prowed canoes preparing for battle, we were mighty



glad to be hailed in broken English and find they were willing to be friendly and they were glad we were willing to be the same. At Sipoen we were most hospitably entertained, given plenty of fresh water, fowls, fruit, bread yams etc and were soon on our way to Titan, 30 miles distant.

After rounding the western point of Titian we had to beat up against a head wind to the harbour or cove, as it was about dark and we did not know the channel we laid off until morning, when we found the natives had thought we were pirates and were prepared to give us a warm reception, perhaps we looked like it. They had a little cannon and were prepared to use it. In the morning they were willing to be friends, they treated us nicely and sent us on our way on the last leg of our journey to Guam now in possession of the United States and which was the end of our trip of 3800 miles from Wings Island in open boats on a ration of  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint of water and  $\frac{1}{2}$  biscuit of hard bread per day (the sea biscuits were about the size of a small saucer and  $\frac{1}{2}$  in to three fourths inch thick very hard) and every man sound and well.

We arrived at Guam in the first part of the night and had to lay outside the reef all night, in the morning when the Governor found out who we were he ordered the inhabitants to take care of us which they did and did it royally, dividing their clothes with us and all the grub we could stow away, cigars of native tobacco etc.

Guam had been a Spanish penal colony at that time, numbering perhaps five, six or eight hundred inhabitants, was a good calling place for fresh water etc. on the route to the Okatsk Sea or Arctic Ocean, generally quite a number of Whalers called there for that reason.

Our 25 days on the Coral reef (Wing Island) had put us in the rear of the Whaling fleet that usually came there, sixty days after landing the Swedish Brig "Knut Bond" Captain Hobbins, put in for fresh provisions, they took Captain Wing, Mr. Carroll and two of the crew to Hong Kong.

After another thirty days the Spanish ship Bella Vascongarda put in for fresh water, they took the writer and four others to Manila, that was all they could take.

In about ninety days the last of the Cantons crew were off on different ships for different ports some never to meet again. How the writer shipped on the Swedish ship Von der Palm, Captain Von Heir at Manila to China for a cargo of tea thence to Liverpool.

How we met W.A. Ashley and T.E. Braley of Long Plains in Hong Kong, how Ashley had been arrested for some trivial offence against the rules of the ship he came over on,

How we went before the American Consul and told him what his duties were and ~~came~~ came near being arrested ourselves,

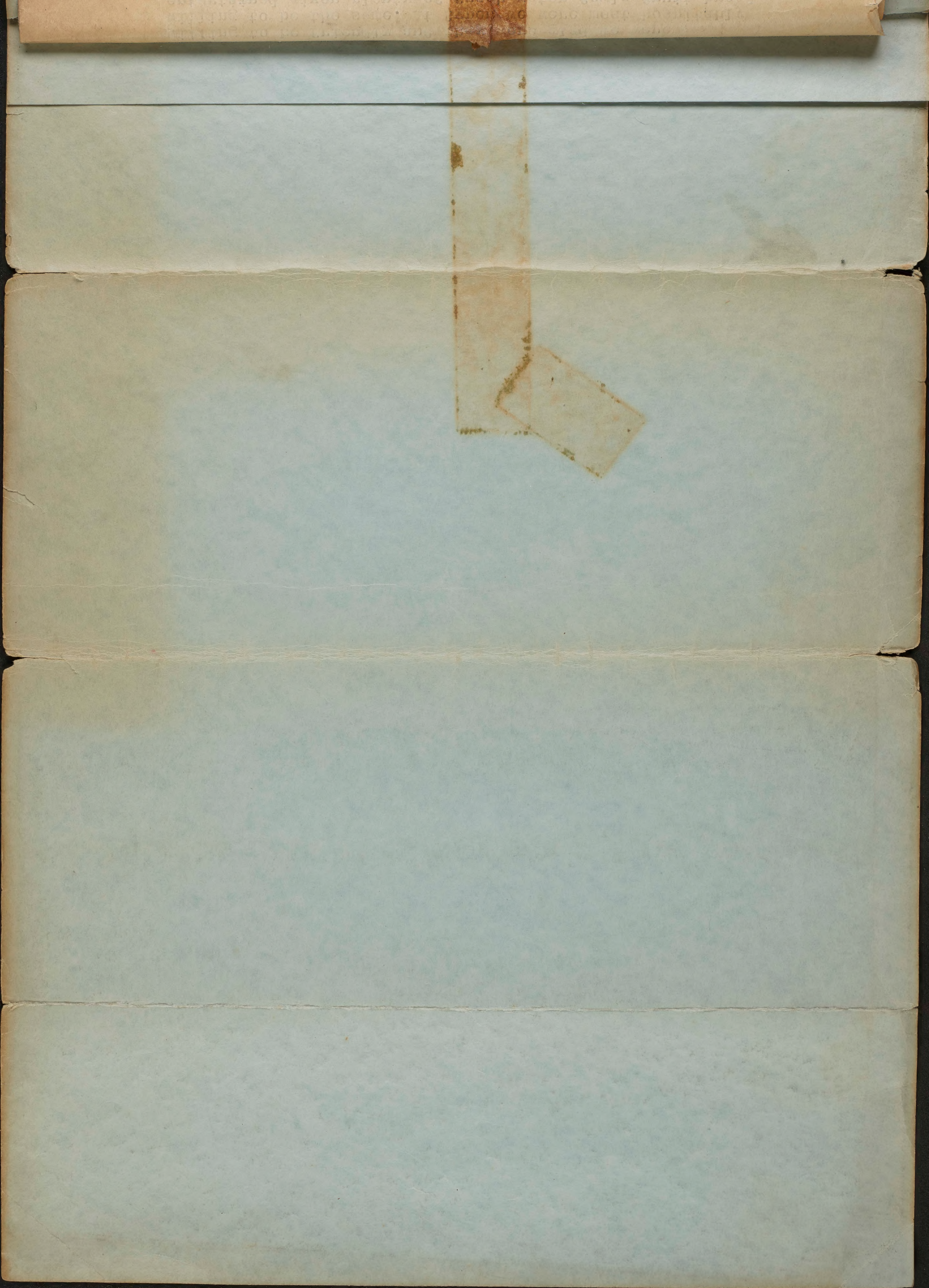
How Ashley and Braley shipped on the Von der Palm and we went up the coast took on the tea then around East Cape for ~~XXXX~~ Liverpool. How about all the crew struck for better grub, mutinied in fact while coming down the Indian Ocean and after 48 hours went on duty again with better grub,

How Captain Wonheis did not attempt to prosecute us when we came where he could so for we had committed a capital crime refusing to work the ship on high seas, but it would be too long a story, we parted at Liverpool, we visited Captain Wing, Ashley, Braley and Manther at Long Plains some forty years after and had a grand time.

There is no record of a more remarkable adventure than that of the ship Cantons wreck and escape of the crew in the history or fiction.

----- J. S. Longley







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